RECOMMENDATIONS SUMMARY

Addressing disparities affecting military families of color is a matter of national security and necessary to ensure long-term military readiness.

Blue Star Families conducted this study in consonance with our mission to help military families thrive to strengthen the All-Volunteer Force. A significant number of our current and future military come from diverse families. Their experience within the military and within the communities where their service takes them matters for the resilience, safety, growth, readiness, retention, and recruiting of our All-Volunteer Force. In terms of recruiting: today, a significant number of recruits come from diverse families. By 2027, most prospective recruits (U.S. population 29 or younger)[1] will be people of color with diverse backgrounds, and the military will be competing for their talent. People of color considering military service will look for representation in senior leadership and key leadership positions and assignments, as they see in other sectors. However, the senior leaders they want to see entered service 25 to 30 years ago, and too few of them have made it to senior ranks, especially within the Officer corps (see Finding 2).

Our military today is racially and ethnically diverse; 31% of the total DoD military force identify as a racial/ethnic minority.[2] Additionally, a sizeable number of white, non-Hispanic service members having an immediate family member of a different race or ethnicity. Considering these mixed-race families, it is very likely that the majority of military families have diversity within the family unit. Due to shifting national demographics that will certainly be true in the future.[3]

Coupled with the fact that 71% of American youth are ineligible for military service,[4] the military must undertake significant steps to recruit service members of color and retain them and their families. The findings from this study offer insight into new ways to increase the retention of service members of color: improve experiences for family members of color, and remove career penalties or unfavorable consequences for service members who choose to prioritize the safety and comfort of their family over their career.

The military alone cannot solve the challenges this study reveals.

The military has been taking steps to address racial/ethnic disparities in personnel and readiness reforms for decades, with mixed results, but they are not alone. The challenges revealed by the study reflect challenges in American society. In fact, there are a number of areas in which the military out-performs the society-at-large in terms of positive outcomes for people and families of color. Moreover, in most of the challenges identified in this report, the military alone cannot be the sole agent of change. Every organization, community, and individual which desires to support military and Veteran families will be less effective if they fail to consider the unique experiences of military and Veteran families of color in their efforts.

To that end, the Blue Star Families team interviewed over 100 government, non-profit, and community stakeholders to identify and prioritize viable recommendations and best practices to begin moving forward. These are intended to help leaders prioritize action and start new conversations about creating sustainable change.

Recommendations

Build Stronger Relationships and More Inclusive Military and Veteran Communities

Detailed in depth on pg. 100

1. **Be an Ally:** Speak up against racism and racist comments.
2. **Actively pursue** inclusive mentorship opportunities and integrate them into existing job requirements and programs to support all military- and Veteran-connected groups, including spouses and military children.
3. **Provide** military and Veteran service members and families opportunities to engage in difficult but productive conversations about race, ethnicity, and more.

Empower Civilian Communities to Support Military and Veteran Families of Color & Encourage Military Installations to Continually Engage Their Local Communities

Detailed in depth on pg. 104

1. **Allocate** additional resources to strengthen civil-military relationships at the local level and bolster support systems on installations.
2. **Collaborate** at the local level and proactively include military- and Veteran-connected families of color in local community conversations about diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI).
3. **Infuse** local civilian organizations with diverse talent and knowledge about military and Veteran communities by hiring more military spouses, Veterans, and spouses of Veterans of color.

Strengthen and Diversify the All-Volunteer Force

Detailed in depth on pg. 108

1. **Update** diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) plans to address challenges military dependents of color face and identify best practices for working with local civilian communities to solve them.
2. **Apply** best practices from other industries and sectors to support service members of color throughout their time in service.
3. **Assess** existing military entry paths and remove barriers to entry for prospective service members of color.
4. **Continue to diversify** ROTC scholarship recipients through broader recruitment, and assess program completion and commissioning rates among those enrolled in the program.

Improve Data Collection and Understanding

Detailed in depth on pg. 111

1. **Improve** existing data collection to identify and address disparities for service members, Veterans, and family members of color in a more reliable and timely fashion.
2. **Explore** how to use existing data to improve experiences for military and Veteran families of color.
3. **Deepen understanding** of issues identified in this report and others.

Best Practices

White Oak Collaborative Subcommittee on Racial Equity and Inclusion: Recommended Practices for Military and Veteran Serving Organizations

Detailed in depth on pg. 115 and at
bluestarfam.org/racial-equity-initiative/collaboration

1. **Be intentional**
2. **Gather data**
3. **Implement** equitable and inclusive policies and practices
4. **Train** managers and staff
5. **Engage more and better:** Diversity brings diversity
6. **Review** progress and develop new goals

How the Private Sector & Philanthropic Foundations Can Support Military and Veteran Families of Color

Detailed in depth on pg. 118

1. **Highlight the importance** of serving military and Veteran families of color among existing grantees.
2. **Invest in organizations** that support and have a strong staff and board representation from military and/or Veteran families of color.
3. **Consider supplier diversity.**
4. **Break down walls** between existing initiatives within your company. Initiatives that support military or Veteran families, and initiatives that support DEI work should not be mutually exclusive or operate in silos.

Recommendations

Build Stronger and More Inclusive Relationships Within Military and Veteran Communities

1. Be an Ally: Speak up against racism and racist comments.

57% **of active-duty family respondents* report hearing military-connected peers make racist comments or jokes**

&

46% **of active-duty family respondents* report they have been the subject of slurs or jokes at least once in their military community since January 2020**

"Calling out inappropriate comments and behavior"
is the most requested allyship action

Out-right and veiled racist comments – including "jokes"– "are linked to low self-esteem, increased stress levels, anxiety, depression, and suicidal thoughts"[5] among underrepresented groups. Moreover, even when the speaker's intention is not to hurt, such expressions "harm the psychological and physical well-being of minorities."[6]

Everyone can support their friends, colleagues, and brothers and sisters in arms by speaking up when they hear racist comments, and it is crucial for authority figures – including members of the chain of command and senior spouses – who are leaders and advocates to do so.

See it in action

The Southern Poverty Law Center's Learning for Justice Project: Six Steps to Speak Up[7]
Learn more about how you can tailor these steps to your personal situation:
Speak-Up-2021.pdf (learningforjustice.org)

- **"Be Ready.** You know another moment like this will happen, so prepare yourself for it. Think of yourself as the one who will speak up. Promise yourself not to remain silent.
- **Identify the Behavior.** Sometimes, pointing out the behavior candidly helps someone hear what they're really saying. When identifying behavior, however, avoid labeling, name-calling or the use of loaded terms. Describe the behavior; don't label the person.
- **Appeal to Principles.** If the speaker is someone you have a relationship with — a sister, friend or co-worker, for example — call on their higher principles.

- **Set Limits.** You cannot control another person, but you can say, "Don't tell racist jokes in my presence anymore. If you do, I will leave." Or, "My workspace is not a place I allow bigoted remarks to be made. I can't control what you say outside of this space, but here I ask that you respect my wishes." Then follow through.
- **Find an Ally/Be an Ally.** When frustrated in your own campaign against everyday bigotry, seek out like-minded people and ask them to support you in whatever ways they can. And don't forget to return the favor: If you aren't the first voice to speak up against everyday bigotry, be the next voice.
- **Be Vigilant.** Remember: Change happens slowly. People make small steps, typically, not large ones. Stay prepared, and keep speaking up. Don't risk silence."

2. Integrate inclusive mentorship opportunities into existing job requirements and programs to support all military and Veteran groups, including spouses and military children.

64% of active-duty service member **&**

56% of active-duty spouse respondents* report desiring some form of mentorship

Mentoring offers a wide array of benefits,[8] including, but not limited to, building competence, leadership skills, self-awareness, and morale,[9] while enhancing retention and promotion, especially for people of color.[10] The military has long recognized the benefits of, and need for, expanded mentorship programs,[11] and this study provides insight into how those programs can be implemented to meet the needs expressed by active-duty service member and active-duty spouse respondents.

For example:

- Existing programs can be assessed to determine their effectiveness at supporting service members of color. New modules and guidance can be provided to mentors in existing programs to address career development and personal concerns. "Employment, career exploration, professional development, and leadership development" is the top desired mentorship focus area for active-duty service members and active-duty spouse respondents and is also the focal point of many existing mentorship programs.

See it in action

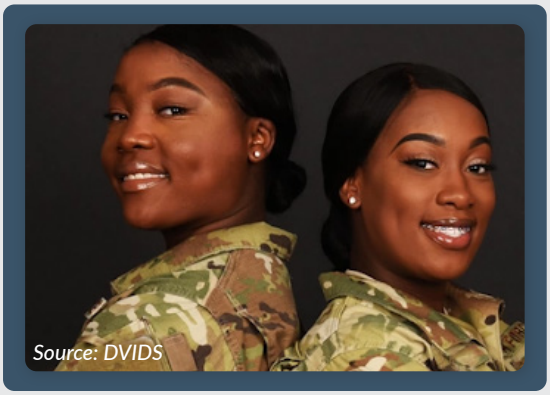
The Air Force's LEVEL Up Program[12]

The Air Force recently launched a six-month, cohort-style professional development pilot program designed through an equity and inclusion lens and specifically intended to usher diverse candidates into leadership.

Source: DVIDS

- Expand mentorship topic areas beyond professional development. "Family life / social skills" was the second most common desired mentorship area for both active-duty service member and spouse respondents*, followed by "education, access, academic enrichment" and "financial management." Examples of innovative structures for these programs include e-mentoring, reverse mentoring, group mentoring, and rank-neutral mentoring.

See it in action:


Source: DVIDS

The Army's Female Mentoring and Morale Program (FMMP) and Sisters in Arms (SIA)[13]

Both the FMMP and SIA began as a grass-roots, group mentorship program, and the Army is currently expanding the program to additional installations. This program provides an open, cross-rank platform for mentorship, teaching, learning, and bonding.

The Navy's Reverse Mentoring program[14]

Initiated by the Navy's Office of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion, reverse mentoring is intended to build awareness of biases and barriers in the Navy by pairing senior leaders – who tend to be older and whiter – with more junior Sailors – who tend to be younger and more diverse.

Source: DVIDS

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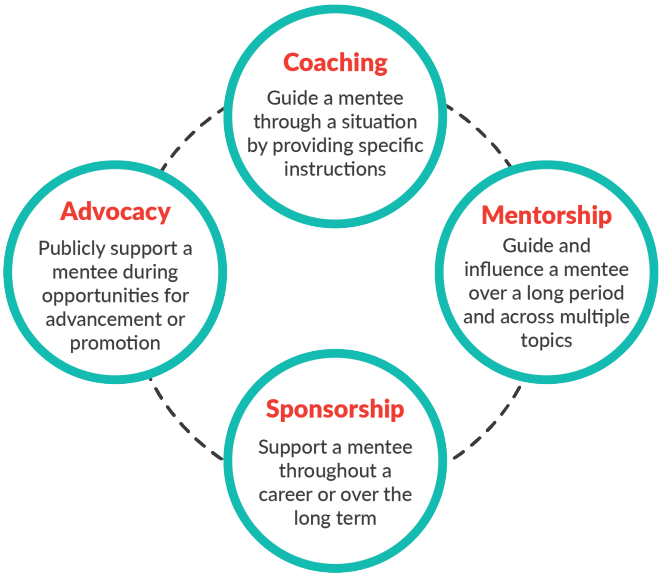
See it in action

U.S. Special Operations Command Spouse Mentorship Programs[15]

Funded by the Preservation of the Force and Family (POTFF) program, some spouses in special operations units have access to bi-directional mentorship programs that are spouse-led with unit/command support (as opposed to some Family Readiness programs, which are unit/command-led with spouse support). These programs are a promising model for peer-to-peer/rank-blind mentorship programs for military spouses outside of the traditional Family Readiness programming.

- To maximize the utility of any mentorship program, members of Blue Star Families' Racial Equity and Inclusion Committee **developed the following framework to address the multi-faceted needs expressed by service members and families of color in this study:**



3. Provide opportunities for military and Veteran service members and families to engage in difficult but productive conversations about race, ethnicity, and more.

#1 Recommended Action Military Can Take to Address Racial Equity Concerns:

"More diversity training and opportunities for open dialogue"
among all respondents when asked in an open-ended format

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These spaces – dedicated to learning and listening – should be established early (e.g., starting in MEPS, Basic Training, ROTC, etc.), occur often (continuously offered in all Professional Military Education (PME) modules, mentoring programs, etc.), and be included in family programs. These forums exist within the services and can be expanded in scope and/or frequency to address chronic issues and current events. For example, in 2020, the Department of Defense hosted a town hall emphasizing the importance of diversity and inclusion.[16] This program demonstrates the military's dedication to this issue, and provides a model for smaller forums.

See it in action:

Source: DVIDS

The U.S. Army's Project Inclusion Listening Sessions[17]

The Army has hosted more than six dozen listening sessions for Soldiers and civilians to discuss diversity, equity, and inclusion issues that impact readiness and unit cohesion. According to Anselm Beach, deputy assistant secretary of the Army - Equity and Inclusion, these sessions encourage participants to share their own experiences, learn from others, and influence the future of Army policy. This model can be scaled and targeted to support the military spouse community, installations, and military units of any size.

Empower Communities and Installations to Support Military and Veteran Families of Color

1. Allocate additional resources to strengthen civil-military relationships at the local level and bolster support systems on installations.

Local civilian elected officials can take steps to ensure government officials and employees are making their community as welcoming as possible for all military and Veteran families of color. In some cases, they may require external funding to do so. Philanthropic organizations, Congress, and other grant-making organizations should assess possibilities for making such funds available.

For example:

- Public administration officials (including elected leaders, service providers, and local non-profits) in communities with military installations and/or a large Veteran population may require local government officials to undertake cultural competence training inclusive of both military and Veteran life and race/ethnicity.

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See it in action:

Source: DVIDS

The International City/County Management Association's Equity Officer Institute

Recently launched its free Equity Officer Institute for local government officials committed to addressing race, equity, inclusion, and social justice issues.[18]

- Local communities and installations can work to strengthen community-police relationships and build trust with local community members of color through grant programs, embedded liaison programs, cultural competency training, and intentional partnerships.[19] The military can also address concerns such as those raised in the Fort Hood report and ensure military Criminal Investigation Division (CID) personnel are embedded in local police departments at every installation.[20]

Only 30% of Black active-duty family respondents trust their local civilian law enforcement, and half trust military law enforcement.

- Local service and resource providers should maintain online and virtual resources beyond pandemic restrictions. Although the COVID-19 pandemic had detrimental effects on much of society, military and Veteran families were able to take advantage of newly virtual resources. This study suggests that any steps to make resources more accessible will benefit military and Veteran families of color.

- All service and resource providers should assess military and Veteran resources through a racial equity lens and all racial equity and inclusion resources through a military and Veteran lens. Military and Veteran communities are diverse, and support systems and resources must understand and acknowledge this diversity.

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- State leaders should assess licensure requirements to support military families of color who want to maintain employment and/or continuity of care services across state lines. Licensure reciprocity could have an outsize impact on military families of color. For example, military spouses of color face substantially greater unemployment and lower earnings; licensure reciprocity provides those in licensed fields more flexibility in working with their employer to retain their position when they move. Additionally, finding a culturally-competent care provider was a challenge for active-duty family respondents. If these families have identified a health or mental health provider with whom they feel comfortable and that provider offers telehealth services, it would be beneficial for families of color to maintain continuity of care with their provider. However, in some cases, they are unable to do so if the provider is required to have a license in the state where the care recipient resides.

Military and installation leaders can maximize their support for military families of color both on and off base by surging resources to installations in less racially diverse areas and emplace metrics to measure their effectiveness.

For example:

- Establish and/or support affinity groups at installations, especially in less racially/ethnically diverse areas. These groups may provide a much-needed source of support for service members, spouses, and military youth of color in these communities. Additionally, these groups can be a forum for bidirectional resource/information sharing.

- Installations located in less racially/ethnically-diverse civilian communities may have a greater need for culturally-competent care and diverse service providers on the installation. Leaders in these locations should strive to hire a diverse staff, and ensure that all officials interfacing with the civilian community (e.g. school liaison officers, military law enforcement professionals, physical and mental health care providers, etc.,) receive supplementary cultural competence training, and proactively seek to identify challenges stemming from racism in the local community.

2. Collaborate at the local level and proactively include military and Veteran families of color in community conversations about Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion.

Military and Veteran families are members of the communities where they live however, the organizations that specialize in supporting them are not always well-connected to local community organizations, particularly those working to address racial equity concerns. Collaborative action across sectors at the local level is necessary to address the needs of military and Veteran communities of color.

For example:

- Community and installation leaders should establish or expand existing forums to include representatives from civilian, military, and Veteran communities, and proactively have military and Veteran families of color in conversations about community issues. This group must address military and Veteran issues through a racial equity lens and include installation commanders, non-profit organizations and their funders, community organizations, governance organizations, local law enforcement, and other local leaders.

See it in action:

Maxwell Air Force Base's Freedom to Serve Initiative[21]

The Freedom to Serve Initiative was established to identify challenges and obstacles to inclusion that exist on the installation and in the local community that "impede Airmen's ability to excel." This group streamlines communication, collects stories, and develops action plans to help create equal opportunities for all Airmen across the installation.

Source: DVIDS

3. Infuse local civilian organizations with diverse talent and knowledge about military and Veteran communities by hiring more military spouses, Veterans, and spouses of Veterans of color.

Hiring initiatives for Veterans and military spouses and dependents throughout the community can provide many benefits. In addition to addressing acute employment needs for military spouses of color, community organizations gain valuable knowledge which helps to inform future programming or policies designed to support military and Veteran communities, including those of color.

See it in action:

Source: DVIDS

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion at Instant Teams[22]

Instant Teams is a Military Spouse Owned-certified company that values military hiring and racial/ethnic diversity: 66% of its workforce are military-affiliated and 52% of its team members identify as non-white.

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Build a Stronger and More Diverse All-Volunteer Force

1. Update diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) plans to address the challenges military dependents of color face and identify best practices for working with local civilian communities to solve them.

30% of active-duty family respondents* turned down orders, knowing that it may negatively impact the service member's career.

"Racism in the local community"
is **#3** reason for doing so

The military alone cannot solve the issues identified in this study. However, formally acknowledging the role local communities play, can serve as a catalyst for collaborative and multi-sector action at the local level. While the DEI reports and plans published by the Office of the Secretary of Defense and the various service branches over the past five years are an excellent step forward in addressing many of the challenges, none explicitly address the role communities play in making military families of color feel welcome or the unique experiences of military spouses and children of color. By incorporating these elements into strategic DEI plans, military service branches and installation leaders can maximize mission readiness at the national level (by increasing retention of racially/ethnically diverse troops), at the local level (by helping build stronger communities), and at the family level (by helping families develop a stronger sense of belonging to their local communities).

2. Apply best practices from other industries and sectors to support service members of color throughout their time in service.

1 in 10 active-duty service member respondents* report they are "never able to self-advocate for strong evaluations, assignments, etc."

Many industries, including the defense sector, have been working to advance DEI issues for decades. While the military has led on some issues, structural and cultural barriers have prevented the adoption of other best practices.

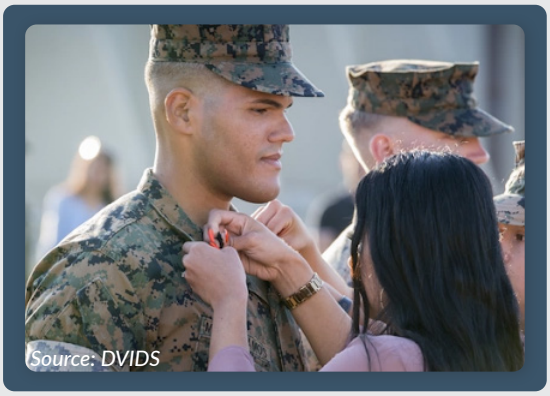
For example:

- The service branches should continue to seek innovative ways to increase service members' control over their careers while also enabling career advancement for those with non-traditional career paths. Blue Star Families has long advocated for this recommendation, which will be welcomed by all military families, not only families of color. Nevertheless, civilian community climate issues identified in this report will take years to resolve. Until that time, the reality is that military families of color will make decisions (such as turning down orders, ranking installation preferences differently, and leaving service) that undermine their service member's career.

See it in action:

The Marine Corps' Talent Management 2030 Plan: Increasing Career Flexibility[23]

The Marine Corps' Talent Management 2030 plan includes a wide array of ambitious talent management reforms that address many of the challenges identified in this study. Regarding increasing career flexibility, the plan seeks to implement policies that encourage reforms such as penalty-free promotion opt-outs and lateral move retention incentives.


Source: DVIDS

- The service branches should explore the viability of establishing a DEI or racial equity and inclusion (REI) skill identifier or occupational specialty to seed this expertise throughout the force. Most Fortune 500 companies have a group of professionals who specialize throughout their career in DEI issues, and while the service branches, Office of the Secretary of Defense, and some installations have specific offices dedicated to DEI, housing that expertise at the smallest unit level possible could help alleviate many concerns. This would be separate and distinct from the Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) formal reporting and complaint process and would instead bring added training value and subject matter expertise.

3. Assess existing military entrance programs and remove barriers to entry for potential service members of color

Service members of color are well-represented in the enlisted ranks, but recruiting and retaining Officers of color remains a challenge (See Finding 2). Existing data and trends can be used to inform these possible solutions.

For example:

- Continue to develop partnerships with higher education institutions to encourage diverse and long-term investment in STEM-related career fields and increase the pool of those with a higher propensity to serve. Building relationships with universities with strong STEM programs and diverse student populations encourages diverse recruitment of service members and civilians within the service branches.

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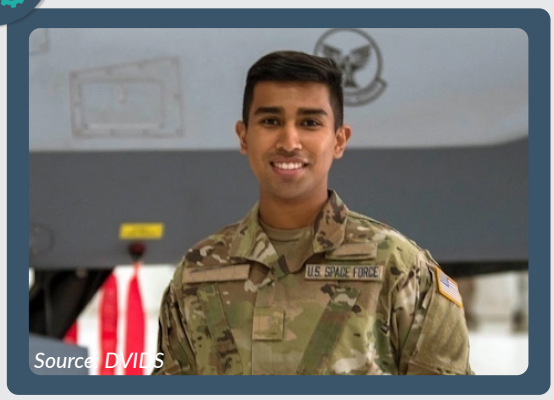
See it in action:



Source: DVIDS

The Space Force's University Partnership Program (UPP)[24]

The Space Force has partnerships with 11 higher education institutions for its University Partnership Program (UPP), including a Historically Black College and University (HBCU) and some of the most prestigious universities in the nation.

- Services can reform the current accession quality rating systems, which consistently and significantly rate Black service members, in particular, as lower quality compared to their white, non-Hispanic peers. It is well documented that students of color receive lower scores on standardized tests,[25] however, concerning military service, these quality scores can influence long-term career trajectories and occupational specialty selection and assignment.

See it in action:

The Navy's Task Force One Report Recommendation: The "Whole Person" Framework for Rating[26]

The Navy's Task Force One report recommends "establishing a 'whole person' evaluation framework that deemphasizes the use of standardized academic tests"to increase the "number of minority applications, selections, and commissioning to reflect relevant national demographic percentages."

Source: DVIDS

4. Continue to diversify ROTC scholarship recipients through broader recruitment, and assess program completion and commissioning rates among those enrolled in the program.

Strides have been made to increase the number of scholarship opportunities at HBCUs, and these should continue. However, these are not the only institutions with racially and ethnically diverse populations. Currently, a smaller proportion of officers of color commission through ROTC scholarships compared to other commissioning sources,[27] however, the research team was unable to locate data regarding the number of ROTC scholarships awarded to future officers of color compared to white, non-Hispanic future officers. Had this data been available, it may have been possible to determine whether this lower rate of commissioning stems from fewer scholarships being awarded or a lower program completion rate. The services should analyze this data and emplace programmatic support systems as needed to support future officers of color enrolled in ROTC scholarship programs.

The appearance of U.S. Department of Defense (DoD) visual information does not imply or constitute DoD endorsement.

Improve Data Collection and Understanding

1. Improve existing data collection efforts and use data to identify and address disparities for service members, Veterans, and family members of color.

The military and Department of Veterans Affairs have data about service members, Veterans, and, to a lesser extent, military dependents and/or caregivers. Despite these widespread data collection efforts, however, the exploratory analysis phase of this study identified a range of discrepancies in data sources, omitted variable bias in critical surveys, and challenges when trying to access publicly available data. To address these challenges, government officials and elected leaders from across the executive and legislative branches should work together to identify and remove barriers, streamline and improve the effectiveness of data collection efforts, reform existing survey instruments and other reporting forms where possible, and improve public access to existing datasets.

For example, the following would have been helpful during this research:

- All federal agencies should add military and Veteran identifiers to existing records and include this information in publicly-available datasets and reports. This one change would empower researchers working on various military or Veteran issues to access larger data sets and conduct more reliable research.

- Create the capacity to reliably assess and report racial/ethnic demographics for military dependents, especially spouses and children. No reliable, publicly-accessible demographic data is available for military children, and data collected as part of the Survey of Active Duty Spouses[28] is weighted to control other variables (e.g., rank) that make it difficult to discern the true proportion of military spouses identifying as a person of color. Collection through systems such as the Defense Enrollment Eligibility Reporting System (DEERS) record and publicly reporting dependent demographics through existing reports (e.g., Survey of Active Duty Spouses,[29] Demographics Profile of the Military,[30] or Population Representation Reports[31]) would greatly improve understanding of these populations.

- Researchers within the military and VA should audit their existing survey instruments through a racial equity lens to identify ways to improve interpretation (e.g., asking about frequency, severity, and location of instances of racial/ethnic discrimination rather than simply if the respondent has experienced it), eliminate omitted variable bias (e.g., including answer choices for respondents of color to voice concerns about racism in communities or military circles), and capture more timely and actionable information (e.g., adding time frames when capturing information about experiences of discrimination to identify emerging trends and the effectiveness of solutions).

See it in action:

Source: DVIDS

The Army's Career Engagement Survey[32]

The Department of the Army Career Engagement Survey (DACES) released its first annual report in December 2021.[33] Results provide excellent insight into issues and concerns that would lead current service members to leave service. For example, the survey identified that 16.5% of respondents reported that mistreatment in the workplace is an "extremely important" reason to leave the Army. When asked to elaborate on what type of mistreatment might precipitate such a decision, "Race," "Gender," and "Color" (all of which are federally protected classes[34]) were the three most common responses. (This question was not reported by race/ethnicity.)

2. Explore how to use existing data to improve experiences for military and Veteran families of color.

- The 2022 National Defense Authorization Act requires a "survey on relations between members of the Armed Forces and communities."[35] (This provision was included in response to a survey conducted by the Association of Defense Communities, which also identified race/ethnicity-related challenges for military families of color in their communities).[36] This community climate survey presents an opportunity to glean valuable insight into civil-military relations at the local level on a wide array of issues, including schools, employment opportunities, and overall experience. It also offers a mechanism by which the military can understand whether or not racial/ethnic tensions exist at the local level, and if so, identify collaborative solutions tailored to the local environment.
- **Analyze** existing data on service member evaluations to determine whether service members of color experience lower ratings, in general and (if they exist) incorporate proposals to address disparities into existing talent management plans. Ideas put forward by survey respondents and focus group participants include: continuous training regarding the importance of diversity, equity, and inclusion to readiness; improved unconscious bias training that is required for all individuals conducting evaluations; inclusion of unconscious bias education into professional military education curricula; and restoring "360 evaluations" in service branches where they no longer occur.

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3. Deepen understanding of issues identified in this report and others.

This study is the first of its kind to explore the experiences of military family members of color, and the work should not end with this report. There are steps that military and legislative leaders can take to improve researchers' ability to understand and support these populations.

For example:

- **Change** legislation to allow federal agencies to shift to a combined race/ethnicity question, in line with recommendations from the U.S. Census Bureau.[37] The current standards on capturing data on race/ethnicity are based on the 1997 Office of Management and Budget (OMB) guidance.[38] It includes two ethnic categories (Hispanic or Latino, and Not Hispanic or Latino) and five racial categories (American Indian or Alaska Native (AIAN), Asian, Black or African American, Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander (NHOPI), and White). Shifting nationwide racial/ethnic demographics and a sharply increasing multiracial population necessitate re-framing how we capture this data to reflect this reality better. Furthermore, the current omission of "Middle Eastern or Northern African" as an independent category makes it difficult to understand the experiences of these individuals in existing data, though it is possible they and their families have unique experiences of service during the Global War on Terror.

- **Conduct** routine exit interviews in all service branches and consider expanding these interviews to include military spouses. Exit interviews are commonplace in other sectors and provide the opportunity to more quickly identify and respond to emerging issues leading families to leave military service.

- **Commission** needs assessments at the local level. Where possible, conduct local needs assessments within the military community or partner with local civilian organizations to ensure that the unique experiences of military and Veteran families of color are considered when developing the study.This report demonstrates the need for a better understanding of military and Veteran families of color; however, what is most needed is installation- and community-specific data.

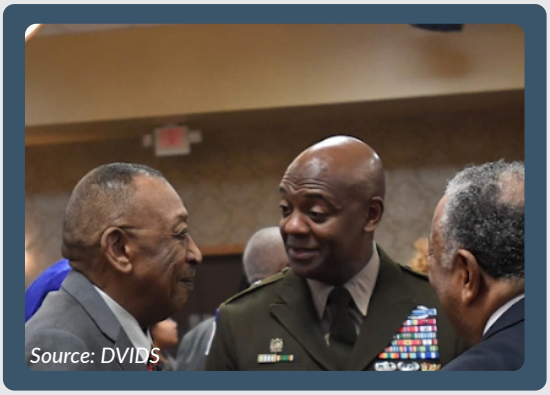
- **Commission and enable** specific studies on sub-groups (e.g., military children of color, military spouses of color, singular racial or ethnic groups) requiring larger datasets. Responsibly making data available to researchers will benefit the entire community and inform how support organizations and communities can be more effective in their work.

See it in action:

The Department of the Army's Career Engagement Survey's (DACES) Data Sharing[39]

The DACES report included the following statement detailing how to obtain a dataset: "In addition, DACES data can also separately be leveraged for secondary research use. DACES contains an Informed Consent statement at the start of the survey, which asks participants about their interest in allowing their responses to be used for future research purposes. During Year 1, 80.5% of the service members who completed a DACES survey consented to allowing their responses to be used for research purposes. Because this report is designed to share DACES findings broadly, only consented responses were analyzed (see page 16). Requests to analyze DACES data may be determined as either Not Research (e.g., command surveillance) or Research (e.g., Exempt or Non-Exempt Human Subjects Research) by an authorized Exempt Determination Official (EDO) or Institutional Review Board (IRB), depending on the intent of the analysis and the purpose of disseminating results."

Source: DVIDS


Source: DVIDS

The Department of Veterans Affairs Minority Veterans Report[40]

The Advisory Committee on Minority Veterans issues a biennial report to identify outcome disparities for Veterans of color. A similar approach could be taken to better understand and track outcomes for military spouses and children of color once data collection measures are in place that enables this analysis.

The appearance of U.S. Department of Defense (DoD) visual information does not imply or constitute DoD endorsement.

Best Practices

For Military and Veteran Serving Organizations

White Oak Collaborative Subcommittee on Racial Equity and Inclusion Recommended Practices for Military and Veteran Serving Organizations

The White Oak Collaborative is a cross-sector coalition committed to supporting service members, Veterans, wounded warriors, caregivers, survivors, and their families. More than 200 members representing military and Veteran support organizations, other nonprofits, and private, philanthropic, government, and community sectors have come together to engage in this non-partisan work. More information and examples of the practices included below, as well as the opportunity to sign-on to endorse these practices, are available on our website (bluestarfam.org/racial-equity-initiative/collaboration).

We, the undersigned military and Veteran serving organizations, are recommending the following practices and programs for our field and beyond. Many of us have piloted these practices in our own organizations. We are committed to these practices to create robust support for all members of our communities including underserved and underrepresented members. We encourage other organizations to make use of these recommendations to create more just, equitable, and inclusive community support organizations.

Be Intentional

- Consider the organization's vision, mission, and strategic plan through a lens of racial equity and inclusion.
- Establish and document clear goals, metrics, and expectations for racial equity and inclusion, especially regarding time and money.

Gather Data

- Measure *who* is part of and served by your organization: regularly collect descriptive and demographic data about your governing board (and other advisory/steering boards), staff, and membership.
    - Once you know *who* you serve, consider measuring *how* your board(s), staff, and members experience your organization. Do this by gathering additional data related to equity (including retention, promotion, and compensation rate for employees from underrepresented groups) and data related to inclusivity and satisfaction.
- Develop a method of gathering intake information and feedback from board members, staff, volunteers, partners, external experts, and members.
- Disaggregate new and existing data/feedback by underrepresented groups.

Implement Equitable and Inclusive Policies and Practices

- Review company policies and revise them to reflect equity- and inclusion-oriented strategic and long-term plans.
- Incorporate racially equitable and inclusive practices into day-to-day operations. For example, use inclusive and intersectional language in internal messaging and conversations.

Train managers and staff

- Develop plans for ongoing training for managers, staff, and volunteers.
- Provide opportunities to reinforce formal training through informal discussions and personal education.

Engage more and better: Diversity Brings Diversity

- Reach a wider population from which to draw board members, staff, volunteers, partners, and members.
- Develop diverse and novel recruitment programs to ensure representation from underrepresented groups.
- Engage inclusively. For example, seek representation and inclusivity in virtual and physical messages, language, and imagery.

Review Progress and Develop New Goals

- Regularly examine progress and report to the governing board.
- Identify and fix what isn't working.
- Develop new or amend short-, medium-, and long-term goals when appropriate.

White Oak Collaborative Subcommittee on Racial Equity and Inclusion Member Organizations

How the Corporate and Philanthropic Sector Can Support Military and Veteran Families of Color

1. Highlight the importance of serving military and Veteran families of color among existing grantees, including both military-serving nonprofits and those who serve the community at large.
When convening or evaluating corporate-philanthropy grantees, facilitate conversations about how their work is serving military families of color.

2. Invest in organizations that support and have a strong staff and board representation from military and/or Veteran families of color.
Financially supporting non-profit organizations that serve military and Veteran families of color is critical to reach and serve racially and ethnically diverse military families.

3. Consider supplier diversity.
Additionally, explore building Veterans and military spouses of color into supplier diversity goals to maximize social impact objectives.

4. Break down walls between existing initiatives within your company. Initiatives that support military or Veteran families and initiatives that support diversity, equity, and inclusion should not be mutually exclusive or operate in silos.
For example, consider funding that encourages existing employee resource groups (ERGs) to host events that combine awareness about different issues. Joint events and learning opportunities between military and diversity ERGs can bridge the gap between two or more of a company's impact initiatives in ways that foster inclusion and recognize the diverse nature of military service. Furthermore, military families and Veterans come from a diverse community and have members represented in many ERGs; use this as an asset to build military family lifestyle cultural competence within your organization. Resources such as the Defense Equal Opportunity Management Institute (DEOMI) provide resources that profile the contributions to the military of diverse groups. They can provide crucial data to bridge the divide on these important areas of work.

See it in action:

Source: DVIDS

Celebrating Native American Heritage Month & Veterans Day at Amazon

Amazon's Global Military Affairs and Indigenous ERGs partnered for an event that celebrated Native American Heritage Month and Veterans Day to educate viewers on the importance of Native American military history and the Navajo Code Talkers.

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